

World Social Forum today - Finnish engagements and future visions

JARNA PASANEN & RUBY VAN DER WEKKEN (2006)

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TAITTO:HENRIK EDLUND

KANSI:SUVI SAVOLAINEN



KEHITYSYHTEISTYÖN PALVELUKESKUS

TÖÖLÖNTORINKATU 2 A

00260 HELSINKI, FINLAND

TEL +358-9-584-233

FAX+358-9-584-23-200

KEPA@KEPA.FI

WWW.KEPA.FI

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Foreword

Thousands of people in Finland have been engaged in the World Social Forum (WSF) process during the last six years. They have organised local and national social forums in Finland and have been active in the global World Social Forums. Finnish civil society organisations have also cooperated with their southern partners in the context of the WSF process and have, for example, helped them to organise national forums in their own countries. Various Finnish organisations have also formed an Africa Commission of the WSF (ACWSF). The commission meetings have emphasised the need in Finland for discussion on the political implications of the WSF process. This Working Paper aims to help meet this need.

We address here the significance of the WSF process to Finnish civil society and its partners and point to some recommendations for future engagement in the process. In the first part we discuss the WSF at a global level. In the second part we look at the engagement of the Finnish actors in the WSF process. We also assess the impact of the WSF on the Finnish activists and organisations, and their southern partners, and look at the dynamics and achievements of the Finnish Social Forum (FSF). In the third part we offer some conclusions and recommendations for future engagements in the WSF process.

Besides the use of several reference works that are listed at the end of this working paper, our main source has been the participatory successful dialogue organised in Helsinki by the ACWSF and KEPA in October 2006. We furthermore conducted interviews with a range of WSF activists in Finland, India, Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania by e-mail and phone. Their names are listed at the end of this study, and we thank them for their valuable contribution to this study.

We would like to thank Outi Hakkarainen from KEPA as well as to our colleagues at the Network Institute for Global Democratisation (NIGD) and Vasudhaiva Kutumkabam (VK) for their important comments. We hope this working paper effectively contributes to a further understanding of and interest in the WSF process, its potential and the possible ways of involvement for Finnish actors and partners.

Tampere and Helsinki, 28 December 2006

Jarna Pasanen

Ruby van der Wekken

PART I

World Social Forum

1. Channelling the rising demand for democratisation

“The WSF has provided a channel through which the movement of globalization protest movements that emerged in the 1990s has partially transformed itself into the movement of global democratisation movements of the early 2000s”, writes Teivo Teivainen in *Democracy in Movement* (forthcoming).

After the massive protests against the official meetings of the international financial institutions and the G7 which came in the spotlight during the Seattle ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1999, the first meeting of the World Social Forum, in 2001, was perceived as a new opportunity for and by social movements and civil society organisations. This new option carried the promise of an answer to the question “what next?” This first WSF was the result of discussions between Brazilian and European movements and civil society organisations, such as Attac France and CIVES (Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania). It gathered some 20,000 people in Porto Alegre as a counter to the World Economic Forum (WEF) taking place in Davos. The enthusiasm to go to Porto Alegre was fuelled by the optimism for the Partido de Trabalhadores (PT) embodied in the personage of Ignacio Lula da Silva. Those coming to Brazil wanted to be part of this promising gathering of civil society movements in that very place and at that very moment. Since then, the forum process has come to involve over a million people, their organisations and their agendas in about two hundred local, national, regional also thematic forums in most parts of the world. Thousands of these people would not have otherwise worked together.

The WSF process is expanding, taking root in new areas. The WSFs of 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2005 were held in Porto Alegre (Brasil), the 2004 WSF was held in Mumbai (India), and the polycentric WSF of 2006 took place in Caracas (Venezuela), Bamako (Mali) and Karachi (Pakistan). The 2007 WSF will be held in Nairobi, Kenya. There is less engagement with the WSF processes in Eastern Europe, South East Asia, China and the Arab

world. The United States is having an expanding social forum process which has an important strategic value, with the participation of the Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Campaign platform.

2. Open space of the WSF - global democratic dialogue

What is so unique about the WSF? Are there not already many other effective international forums and platforms to work through?

The WSF is seen politically as a novel process in terms of its *open space* character, from which no unified statements are presented and at which no one represents the WSF as a whole and where leadership is horizontal. This *open space* can be viewed as a process of global democratic dialogue, where in principle any one can take part who adheres to the charter of principle of the WSF, on an equal footing and with equal access to influence and shape alternatives. This stands in stark contrast to other existing global forums, processes or associations. The inclusiveness of the WSF is an important dimension of it and is crucial to its potential.

The WSF can be seen as a space of deliberation, a public space of deliberative democracy. According to Donatella della Porta (2005), *“deliberative democracy, which emphasizes participation and the quality of communication, is particularly relevant for a multifaceted, heterogeneous movement that incorporates many social, generational, and ideological groups as well as movement organizations from different countries.”*

This new formula offers a possibility to overcome past polarizations and an alternative to traditional political alliances. The WSF was born in Brazil out of the coming together of several civil society sectors and actors in a unique way, namely of the traditional NGO's (Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania - ABONG), labour movement (Central Unica de Trabalhadores - CUT), radical peoples movement (MST), liberation theologians (Comissão da Justiça e Paz da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil - CBJP), ethical business NGO's (Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania - CIVES), and the new movements (ATTAC). The WSF is as such seen as a new and encouraging initiative of bringing together new movements and more traditional progressive forces and politics. Furthermore, the WSF is seen as facilitating

joint action by actors from the whole spectrum of progressive politics under their banner 'Another World is Possible'.

According to Antonio Martins (2006) *"the editions of the WSF have been important laboratories for social science, where theories of transformation are being constantly re-elaborated.... It puts all emancipatory streams into contact with each other. For example Gandhism, feminism, liberation theology, Gaia theories, third worldism, humanism, human rights and global justice advocacy, fair trade, many socialist and Marxist tendencies are all in dialogue and enrich each other constantly. Secondly, the debate of ideas does not happen at an academic level, nor amongst political leadership. The forum breaks barriers between intellectuals and activists."*

3. The Role of the International Council, Secretariats and Organising Committees

The 148 members of the WSF International Council (WSF IC) guide the overall WSF process. One important methodological issue addressed by the WSF IC is the safeguarding of the *open space* whilst designing a working space that promotes the formation of alliances and the envisioning of alternatives. A second important methodological issue is the further expansion and thus the inclusiveness of the WSF process. The council, set up in 2001 after the first WSF upon invitation by the Brazilian organizing committee, is constituted of five commissions: communications, content and methodology, expansion, resources, and strategy. The WSF IC typically holds a meeting in conjunction with the WSF and once or twice in between them. The commissions also meet in various instances throughout the year, according to necessity and possibility.

Whereas the WSF IC is formally a mere facilitating body, many consider that it also takes political decisions and therefore urge scrutiny of its composition and decision-making procedures. The call for democratisation is accompanied by addressing the need for better documentation of what happens at the meetings. A newcomer taking part in a meeting of the WSF IC would be bewildered by the proceedings: most of what seems to be going on and decided, seems to be done in an intangible, invisible way. The workings of the WSF IC are guided by the principles of the Charter

of the WSF as horizontality, decision-making by consensus, which goes hand in hand with existing loci of "powerful opinionated strongholds", such as the senior and influential personalities of Chico Whitaker and Oded Grajew.

Another issue is that some feel that too many decisions that have an important bearing on the WSF process as a whole, are made by only a small group of people. Some attempts have been made to open the process, such as the consultation process to determine the 'architectural' pillars and areas of the WSF. The outcome of this process, however, has suffered from limited participation. The issues remain extremely complicated. Take the issue of representation: one may call for a balanced representation in the IC because it takes important decisions. But then how could you facilitate and structure representation in an organ of global civil society that itself is a highly contested concept? While stuck with this dilemma, the IC has been striving to incorporate absent regions or streams in its body, like from Asia and Africa, China and Eastern Europe. The IC embarked on but never completed the project of drawing up a road map on its composition.

The WSF IC is aided by a Secretariat called today the "Collective responsible for the office of the WSF" which is comprised of the eight Brazilian organisations that were the organising committee of the first social forum, namely CUT, MST, ABONG, CBJP, IBASE, ATTAC Brasil, Rede Social de Justicia e direitos Humanos and CIVES¹. The role of the Secretariat/collective is to stimulate and support regional and thematic forums; facilitate the IC meetings and facilitate the WSF IC commissions; ensure WSF communication process; ensure systematization of the memory of the WSF process; and support fund raising for the WSF process.

The organizing committee for each of the WSF events is one more player in the organisational myriad of the WSF. The Mumbai WSF organising committee deliberately had a large number of members of diverse origins (135). For the Nairobi WSF, the organising committee is comprised of 40 organisations from East African countries, as the Nairobi forum is an East African proposal of the East African section of the regional council of the African Social Forum process, which is part of the WSF IC. In the Nairobi process the information flow among the committee members has

¹ Also the India organising committee and its secretariat is considered part of the WSF secretariat after the Mumbai WSF in 2004

been inadequate, which has been seen as a further shortcoming in the workings of the WSF.

4. Participation in the *open space* – full or limited potential?

There are many reasons to participate in a WSF event. The case studies given here elaborate on some of them. An informative study using interviews made at the 2003, 2004 and 2005 WSFs by IBASE (2005), the Brazilian Institute for Social And Economic Analysis, concludes that there seem to be three main reasons for participation in the WSF: exchange of experience among the participants, the proposal of the forum to contribute towards a fairer global society, and the democratic debate of ideas.

The definition of the *open space* was given in 2001 by the Brazilian organising committee: *"The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth"*. In practice this has meant a WSF event of four days comprised of mainly self-organised activities, in which all may participate which adhere to the Charter of Principles.

The *open space*, however, is not completely open. It is further stated in the *open space* definition that *"neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity"*. Political leaders such as the President of Brazil Lula and the President of Venezuela Chavez as well as many organisations linked to the political parties have however always participated in the WSF. For some the fact that no political representatives can take part is counterproductive to the WSF goal of producing social change. For others, the WSF can be conducive or give birth to a new kind of political agency and therefore we

must go beyond thinking in terms of traditional political parties and not be hindered by any dominance of traditional political parties.

Trade unions participate in the WSF prominently, which is seen by many as vital for the building of effective global struggles and action against neoliberalism. Thematically, issues of social-economic justice are the most prominent in the WSF. Criticism has been voiced about the absence of environmental issues in the programme of the WSF. However, others point to the fact that environmental concerns are prominent through the participation of indigenous peoples, peasant farmers and other groups, but that notions of what constitutes environmental concerns should be defined.

Profiling a WSF participant

As the IBASE study (2005) notes, the host-country naturally has the most active participation, followed by neighbouring countries with a far smaller presence, and finally countries from the rest of the world with an even more modest participation. In India in 2004, local participation was 84% of the total (in Brazil in 2005 it was 80%). Most participation in the global WSFs has been from Europe and Latin America. The study finds that regardless of where the WSF is held, participants from the United States, France and Italy are among the most numerous.

The study also finds that in terms of age, the youth at WSF 2005 was the largest segment of participants (which should be seen in light of the traditionally well attended youth camp in Porto Alegre), and that the WSF attracts predominantly those with higher levels of education. Logically, the 2005 forum also showed the large indication of the occupation of participants as being students, and the large presence of civil servants and members of NGOs/civil-society entities/political parties and trade unions as the third most frequent occupation. The latter was the largest group amongst the participants from other countries then the host country Brazil. Most of those present at the 2005 WSF (55.4%) said they participated in social movements or organisations. A third in this group said to be connected to NGOs. Among participants from other countries than the host country, the percentage of those saying to be connected to an NGO was 52.7%. The study suggests that the costs and resources required to take part in the WSF contribute towards explaining the

² In WSF charter of Principle at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

³ In WSF Charter of Principle at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

high number of NGO members, especially among foreign participants.

Criticism and challenges to the *open space* of the forum are to be found in the question about whether there are grassroots groups or large international NGOs participating in the forums? INGO's can appear to set the stage of the WSF as they have the resources to make themselves visible in terms of large events and abundant publicity material. As Taoufik Ben Abdallah (ENDA) said at the IC meeting in Holland in April 2005, a market analogy can be drawn to the *open space*, assumed to be regulated by Adam Smith's invisible hand. In this sense there is a real challenge to the *open space* with equal access on an equal footing of the democratic dialogue assumed earlier. Campaigns such as Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), or large INGO's such as Oxfam seem to have much easier access to the *open space* and are seemingly present on a much larger footing than small grassroots groups. The WSF in Mumbai was characterized by mass participation of dalits, adivasis and vernacular groups. This greatly strengthened the debate on inclusiveness and participation in the WSF process, or in short towards a democratisation of the forum process. After the Mumbai forum the WSF global events became to be mainly self organised – certainly a democratisation of the *open space*.

WSF in the media

The fact that there is no official programme has made it difficult for the media to find out what to focus on, and in general it is believed that this is why large events organised by well-funded NGOs with well known speakers get a lot of attention. A more measured judgement seems to be that there has been a lack of a media strategy of the WSF International Council and the organising committees. Many think that the WSF could be more visible in the mainstream media than it has been. However, for those with no means to organise events, the wholly self-organised character of the WSF also presents a problem which brings us back to the analogy of the *open space* as a market place and the need for further opening and further reflections on a democratisation of the *open space* and what this entails.

Participation in the WSF *open space* should not only be viewed in terms of participation in the global WSF events. As such the usefulness of the WSF process is not a matter of whether or not

it is useful to fly a peasant farmer from Indonesia into the WSF *open space* in, say, Nairobi. Rather, we should keep a view of the process of the WSF, with all its forums at different levels. The process could be defined as the further spreading of the *open space* for global democratic dialogue – in which a great challenge is how all the local, national, regional, thematic and global forums relate and feed into each other for the process to be productive.

5. What is the WSF process?

Is the WSF process really a process? The IBASE study (2005) found that a majority of people taking part in a WSF do not take part in preparatory events or local forums. The level of participation is highest among people from social movements. Yet, the study also reveals a considerable rise in the level of participation in local and preparatory events between 2003 and 2005, which the it sees as *“a really important indicator, in as much as it expresses the growing capacity and vitality of the WSF, passing from an ensemble of events to a systematic process”* (IBASE 2005, page 60). We could view this as the spreading of the *open space*, which is to be made ever more inclusive. Different reports from social forum processes are testifying that the WSF is providing a model strengthening struggles, as a study by Miles Larmer (2006) points to: *“Based on attendance at and interviews with participants in Southern African social forums, it is argued that whilst the influence of Africans on the global social justice movement remains limited, Southern African social movements are utilising the social forum model to strengthen their own struggles.”* In this sense the spreading of the *open space* is the process.

However, as Larmer mentions here, at present there is no mechanism for the different forums to feed into each other. Whether results and proposals from the different levels in the WSF process do do or not is of course part of the assessment of the WSF as a process. Perhaps one day this could be technically possible using the WSFprocess.net (see chapter 7), which is limited to the world of internet users. In a process with good feedback mechanisms between the connected levels, displacements from one side of the world to another to attend a world social forum would not be a necessity, whilst at the same time there are important lessons in the displacement.

But whether or not WSF participants experience the WSF as a process also depends on their level of engagement.

6. Is another world really possible through the WSF?

Is the world moving towards being a better place after seven years of the WSF process? Is the design of that better place today more developed and visible because of the WSF? If not, what is the WSF for?

“The other possible world is a utopian aspiration that comprises several possible worlds. The other possible world may be many things, but never a world with no alternative. The utopia of the WSF is a radically democratic utopia...This utopian design, grounded on the denial of the present rather than the definition of the future, focused on the processes of intercourse among the movements rather than an assessment of the movements’ political content, is the major factor of cohesion of the WSF,” writes Portuguese social scientist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004, page 12). Santos points to the need to see the WSF slogan not as a cliché, but to see its functionality in the growth of the WSF process. It should be noted that in the IBASE study of 2005, the reason the participants gave most weight to participate the forum, was in fact the proposal of the forum to contribute towards a fairer global society.

The quote by Teivo Teivainen at the beginning of this analysis stresses that what further provides cohesion for the WSF movements is the demand for democratisation. An interesting working paper by IROWS (2006), the Institute for Research on World-Systems, uses the results of a survey of participants at the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre to examine North/South issues and differences within the progressive sector of global civil society. The point of the study is *“to reflect on the problems of overcoming contradictions among and within counter-hegemonic transnational social movements in order to promote more effective cooperation in global social justice projects”*. Participants were asked whether they thought global capitalism should be reformed or if it should be abolished and replaced. 58 % of the activist attendees indicated that they were in favour of abolition and replacement.

They were also given three options for international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the

World Trade Organization. The three options were: reform; abolish; abolish and replace. 61 % of all activist participants favoured abolition and replacement, while 25 % were in favour of abolition alone, and only 13% were in favour of reform. This means that though a majority of participants advocate radical changes in global institutions, only 25 % would be in favour of abolishing them totally. Taking into consideration that a significant part of respondents are Brazilian Youth Camp radical participants, the average WSF participant advocates global democratic radical reforms.

The WSF: no outcome?

Critics of the WSF process say that the forum only wants to offer an *open space* to discuss, whereas the WSF process should itself start to speak. This criticism has been in particular voiced by large movements such as the international peasants network Via Campesina. However, for the defenders of the *open space*, a WSF speaking in one voice would be its downfall. Also, the WSF is indicated as having a methodology that wants to promote the outspokenness and capacity to be outspoken of its participants. This methodology encourages in the run up to the WSF the co-organisation of events in order to stimulate alliance building. Also the physical structure of the WSF is geared towards the development of alternatives. In 2005, a consultation process led to a thematic spatial division of the WSF territory in Porto Alegre, whereas for the forum in Nairobi another consultation process will lead to a physical layout of the forum territory according to the action areas of WSF participating organisations. Besides pointing to methodology, others argue that while there is some unity in the criticism to the present ‘capitalist paradigm’, there is not necessarily agreement on alternatives that are all-inclusive? For the global WSF 2007 in Nairobi a new methodological step is to have three days of self-organised activities and the fourth day set aside for alternatives.

Interestingly at the last WSF International Council meeting in Parma, Italy, the decision⁴ was reached to hold a week of mobilisations in 2008 and then a normal forum in 2009. The decision has

⁴ For a thorough treatment on the issues involved in this decision making procedure on the periodicity of the forum see Teivo Teivainen, “WSF 2009 – Dilemma’s of decision making on the Periodicity of the Forums”, NIGD News and Notes Newsletter October 2006, www.nigd.org

mostly been positively welcomed for different reasons. Some believe the decision for the mobilisations potentially adds to the political significance of the WSF. For others the main importance of the decision is that the energy released by not having to gear up for another WSF in 2008 would importantly strengthen the local, regional, national and thematic forums. Yet others feel that whilst the mobilisation week will perhaps be able to gather movements in unison behind certain well known criticisms of the current neoliberal paradigm, the *open space* will remain necessary to develop more comprehensive alternatives and to envision their actual and practical implementation.

Clearly it is very difficult to measure in absolute terms the outcome of the WSF. Each participant in the WSF process whether on a local, regional or global level can tell his or her own story of learning, use, significance, and contribution. These are of course important and tangible testimonies of the significance and depth of the WSF process.

Assemblies, Declarations, Manifestos and Appeals

There are also platforms that have emerged through the WSF process, such as the social movements' assembly and its Call for Action Agenda. This Assembly brings together hundreds of social movements, which have been established through the WSF process, and which have a secretariat in Brasil in the hands of CUT and MST among others. The massive anti-war demonstrations of February 2003 are seen as having come out of the WSF process, and as a manifestation of its strength. Numerous other mobilisations have come about or were strengthened by the call of the social movements' assembly. Another example is the case of the common declaration issued on water through the convergence of social movements and organisation of the WSF at Caracas. The common platform created in Caracas as well as the declaration were an important impetus and part of a process which led to an alternative declaration signed by the governments of Bolivia, Cuba, Uruguay and Venezuela at the 4th World Water Forum.

The Social Movements Assembly is not a case of breaking with the WSF charter. Neither is the Manifesto of 19 of Porto Alegre⁵ issued at the

⁵ http://opendemocracy.typepad.com/wsf/2005/02/previous_posts_.html#more

WSF in 2005. The manifesto "calls for agreement among WSF participants on a clear set of goals for world economic reform". The Porto Alegre Manifesto was much criticized for the procedures according to which it was presented: all but one of the initial signatories were male, there was a top-down approach with a group of intellectuals drawing up a 'truth' to be signed up to by the masses. The manifesto died out fast.

A second initiative also provoked much heated debate. On 18 January 2006, the day before the opening of the polycentric WSF 2006 in Bamako, Mali, a controversial gathering took place. The conference, initiated largely by Samir Amin, attracted some 80 alter-globalists from different parts of the world and was called the Peoples' Bandung Conference. The conference and its appeal gave rise to controversy and debate, both regarding its process and the content of the appeal. Process and content are linked. Though many seem to share the critical stance of the manifesto, the point has been made that these appeals are presented as the calls of social movements, but are merely drawn up by intellectuals. This suggests a rather sectoral working within the WSF process instead of using potential for the cross fertilisation of ideas between intellectuals and activists that the WSF *open space* intends to offer. However, discussing the Bamako Appeal or any other manifesto can be very educational (for such a treatment see Custers' 2006 appraisal of the Bamako Appeal). It also seems that for the 2007 forum Samir Amin is initiating large tables of discussion that seem to mirror the effort of the Bamako Appeal.

7. WSFprocess.net – towards a database of proposals of the movement of movements

There is more to the issue of the WSF as a tool for social transformation. The WSF has its own methodology with which it wants to make the *open space* a tool for social transformation by attempting to further political action not by the WSF itself, but through the WSF process. In 2005, an extensive database accompanied the WSF. Organisations wanting to participate in the WSF could consult via different search options the events organised by others. Agglutination or the holding of joint events was promoted by this methodology. Several groups joined their events

around common themes, such as 'Towards another financial system', which grouped together a series of events with a large group of organisations from different countries. In 2006 this methodology was taken further. A well founded criticism of the methodology is that it is largely internet based, with all the obvious limitations. Also, especially in 2006, the technical process of using the internet was complicated and not participatory.

Another initiative furthering the shaping and visibility of alternatives through the WSF process has been the 'mural of proposals'. During the WSF 2005, concrete proposals were gathered at stands and at the end of the forum and a physical mural of proposals could be visited that was translated on an ongoing database. This method was not found to be very inspirational or fruitful and has not been used since. Within the International Council it has been a struggle to conceptualise the alternatives coming forth out of the WSF process without putting them upfront in such a manner that they would be seen as pronouncements of the WSF.

For the WSF 2007 in Nairobi the methodology is being taken further in the development of a user friendly site WSFprocess.net. The site offers tools to develop activities in the run up to and beyond Nairobi. One can create a working area around a certain initiative, develop and store its documents and working papers, and the system will make you a mailing list for the participants to develop the initiative. Forthcoming proposals can be listed and the total of activities is easily accessed by a straightforward search system. Promisingly, the database is intended for use beyond Nairobi and remain a permanent tool for the development of proposals. It is not believed by advocates of the *open space* that the lack of common statement means that there is not a strategy.

8. *Open space* motivates to fund the WSF

It is not just large WSF events that need financing, but also the permanent functioning of the WSF secretariat, the WSF IC and the tasks of its commissions, and the technical office (till 2008 in Sao Paulo). *"In regards and due to the (largely successful) complex political and financial managerial operations, the WSF has been qualified by many simply as 'a miracle', especially by those*

with experience in managing financial operations of diverse, large global events. However, as they themselves admit, 'miracles' only happen once," reads a comment in the interesting study World Social Forum Financial Strategy Report and Recommendations (2006, page 13). The study was requested by the WSF Resource Commission and carried out by a consultancy team, with the aim of assessing and systematising the WSF's experiences in resource mobilisation for the organising of the global events and the process that has taken place from 2001 to 2005. As to the miracle of the WSF global events – for certain critics the WSF has been chaotic in its organisation and the logistical problems have been a thorn in the flesh.

The funding issue of the WSF is both technically and politically a crucial and immensely complicated issue. Apart from the Mumbai WSF the costs of the forums have been increasing each year. The numbers of donors have also been increasing due to the conscious effort to diversify income. At first most of the funding came from government sources in Brazil. *"Until 2005 a total of about 14,6 million USD had been registered and spent in WSF events alone... If unregistered social capital, infrastructure, volunteers, and institutional contributions are taken into account, the actual (conservative) costs of the WSF events most likely surpasses 19 million USD,"* according to *The Financial Strategy Report and Recommendations* (2006, page 12).

Among the major donors have been NOVIB from Holland and the Ford Foundation. In the Nordic countries Sida Sweden has donated some 735,000 euros to the 2004 and 2005 forum in total. From Finland there has been no major funding for the WSF. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has made available some travel grants and funded some Finnish NGO inputs into the WSF process. Recently there has been Finnish funding for the WSF itself as a 15,000 euro contribution by the Siemenpuu foundation.

The Brazilian organising committee of the WSF has seemingly felt that *"the forum cannot receive funds from those that do not want another world to be built"*⁶, writes Chico Whitaker (2005, page 58). The Indian organizing committee of the WSF 2004 in Mumbai took a stern stance on funding, and did not accept certain funders that the Brazilian organising committee had accepted. They stated not wanting funds *"which are clearly*

⁶ Translation of the quote from Portuguese to English by Ruby van der Wekken.

situated on the side of those promoting globalisation and agencies controlled by corporate funds” (Whitaker 2005).

The WSF Financial Strategy Report concludes there is simply a weak management of resources. It has seemingly been fairly easy to get a certain amount of support from certain donors having good ties with respected WSF International Council members. However, with the increasing number of events and increasing budgets, the current financial sources may run dry quickly, with issues such as donor fatigue responsible. A strategy is needed. One way to look at the issue of funding of the WSF is to see this as a case of world public finances.

The Financial Strategy Report and Recommendations points to the Mumbai WSF experience as a model to take lessons from for the Brasil experience which have a lot to do with history, politics and culture “*Contrary to the Brazil experience, the Mumbai WSF organising committee had to begin with a larger (135) and highly diverse number of member organisations. Due to a very mixed group of people working together, and the need for total trust in each other, all the financial and economic tasks and responsibilities had to be totally transparent.*” (2006, page 16).

One of the major motivations for financial support has been one of the major assets of the WSF, the demonstration of “massive force”. According to the *Financial Strategy Report* “*all donors affirm that the WSF as a space is the largest, plural process towards strengthening of civil society in our globalised time. It is clearly seen as an energizing space, where alliance building takes place. Donors as well as others have acknowledged its ability to create horizontal and vertical alliances, and benefit from its nature as an open space, with no final political declarations... Funding sources clearly see the value of this as a different kind of space compared to international alliances like Civicus or Social Watch. The majority of the funders emphatically reiterated their faith in the open space and wanted it preserved and guarded.*” (2006, page 18).

The study reports however that donors feel that the results from the WSF are not made tangible enough, “*even within the concept of the WSF as a space, the forum generates many interesting and innovative processes and alliances as well as clear results and these can be claimed and shared with all stakeholders, including founders. In that*

regard more effort is needed to identify what goes on at the forum and identify mechanisms to assess the follow-up of actions and activities born there.” (2006, page 19). This seems to be in general a very good suggestion regarding the forum. WSFprocess.net seems to offer a good tool, but efforts would need to go further and engage in participant observation to map those results from the forum which take place not recorded in cyberspace.

⁷ Translation of the quote from Portuguese to English by Ruby van der Wekken

PART II

Finns in the WSF and the WSF in Finland

In this part we first look at the involvement of the Finnish actors in the global WSF and at the WSF process in Finland, including of course the Finnish Social Forum (FSF). We will also explain the significance of the WSF process to southern partners of the Finnish international solidarity movement by looking at WSF related activities in three countries where KEPA has partners: Mozambique, Tanzania and India. The quotes from the WSF activists have mostly been collected from a WSF debate organised by the ACWSF and KEPA in October 2006 and our interviews conducted in November 2006.

9. Finnish participation in the WSF process

Involvement in the World Social Forums

The WSF work in Finland has a long-term commitment. At least nine Finnish organisations have participated actively in the international World Social Forum process by organising events, sending participants or contributing otherwise to the process at large. These organisations are ATTAC Finland, CED, NIGD, SASK, Siemenpuu, KEPA, VK, TSL, FOE (see their presentations below). Most of them have been involved in the process from the beginning or for years. Their main engagements are discussed below.

ATTAC is internationally one of the founders of the WSF process and **Attac Finland** has taken the WSF as one of its main areas of activity since the birth of the WSF. The forum process is seen a way to create new transnational spaces for global progressive action and to formulate alternatives to neo-liberal policies. ATTAC members have actively participated in the forums and the international ATTAC network organises its global meetings typically in connection with the WSF events. ATTAC Finland continues to focus its international work on the WSF and hopes to develop the WSF in a more proactive direction. <http://www.attac.fi/>

The **Coalition for Environment and Development** (CED, Ympäristö ja kehitys ry) took an early interest in the Indian WSF and got a three year grant funding from the Finnish foreign ministry (2003-2005) for a development cooperation project that included assisting Finnish and Indian NGOs in organising the programme for the event and issuing supporting publications. This project is now over and CED has no particular plans for future engagement in the international WSF process. However, CED continues to participate in the Finnish Social Forum process. <http://www.ymparistojakehitys.fi/>

Friends of the Earth Finland (FOE, Maan ystävä) has been involved in the national WSF process since 2002 and the international one since the Mumbai 2004 WSF where FOE Finland had many activist participants. Since then FOE Finland has had a low key involvement with FOE International activities related to the WSF. Members of FOE Finland attended the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre as representatives of the FOE International Network. They participated as individual activists at the Indian national forum in November 2006. In WSF 2004 and 2005 FOE Finland arranged some activities in cooperation with others, for instance the International Boycott Bush campaign. <http://www.maanystavat.fi/>

The Network Institute for Global Democratisation (NIGD) has been an active contributor to the WSF process since the first social forum in 2001. NIGD became a founding member of the WSF International Council in 2001 and has actively contributed to its work ever since. NIGD has organised or co-organised multiple events at different levels of the WSF process, which have also debated the WSF process itself. For NIGD, the WSF has come to serve as a main platform for developing its work and reflecting on its strategy, and the WSF process has importantly shaped NIGD as an organisation. NIGD has been involved with a variety of initiatives issuing from the WSF process. NIGD has also published discussion papers in Finnish and English about the WSF. <http://www.nigd.org>

The Service Centre for Development Cooperation (KEPA, Kehitysyhteistyön palvelukeskus) decided to actively participate in the WSF process in 2003 by formally adopting the WSF charter and applying for membership of the WSF International Council. KEPA sent and sponsored an impressive delegation to the Mumbai WSF in 2004. KEPA invited its southern partners and board

members to participate in the WSF where also an internal meeting of KEPA was organised on land issues. KEPA was able to use the WSF platform for KEPA's internal needs and for networking. In the previous forums KEPA was mainly active in documentation, it organised for instance daily reporting on its web pages from the WSF. KEPA decided in 2006 not to have as an organisation an active role in the WSF process but is still sending at least some representatives to the main forums in order to follow how the WSF process is proceeding and how it may coincide with KEPA's key activities. KEPA documents the forums in its web site and has also offered an option for its member organisations to apply for a grant to support their participation. <http://www.kepa.fi>

Timo Lappalainen from KEPA comments: *"In our new policy we have started off with the idea that the World Social Forum can be capacity building for our member organisations. There are no hidden objectives; we want the development NGOs to be more political."*

The Finnish civil society funding agency with an emphasis on the environment and human rights, the **Siemenpuu Foundation** (Siemenpuusäätiö), has sponsored WSF related activities on a number of occasions. The main one has been the South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy project in India, which organised great number of events and produced publications for the Asia Social Forum in 2003, World Social Forum in 2004 and India Social Forum in 2006. Another partner has been the Hemispheric Social Alliance in Brazil organising events at the polycentric WSF 2006. Both of the projects and some more contribute to the Nairobi WSF 2007. Siemenpuu is also supporting the bus caravans to Nairobi for African participants. <http://www.siemenpuu.org>

Since the second WSF in 2002, the **Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland** (SASK, Suomen ammattiliittojen solidaarisuuskeskus) has participated in all WSF events. The main idea has been to involve its southern partners in the WSF process, to let them use the WSF as their own forum, to exchange ideas and meet other groups. SASK and its partners also organised some seminars at the WSF and the main focus has been on the monitoring of foreign companies. SASK aims to remain involved in the WSF process. <http://www.sask.fi>

Jukka Pääkkönen from SASK: *"The main significance of our participation has been that our partners have been able to network with each other and meet people they would not otherwise have*

met so easily. This way they can ponder ideas, that otherwise might not have been born or put into action. We have one concrete output that at least partially I credit to the WSF. In our meetings couple of trade union research networks came together who then encouraged each other."

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Finland (VK, Demokratiafoorumi Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) has taken a keen interest in the WSF process. The main effort was done in the Mumbai WSF 2004 when VK was member in a group of Finnish and Indian civil society organisations that facilitated more than fifty events and produced a number of publications. In the Asian polycentric WSF in Karachi in January 2006 a number of events were planned, but since Indians hardly got any visas to attend, most of them had to be cancelled. In 2005 Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam became a member of the WSF International Council. <http://www.demokratiafoorumi.fi/wsf.html>

Representatives of the **Workers Educational Association of Finland** (TSL, Työväen sivistysliitto) have participated a couple of times in the WSF as event organisers (Porto Alegre 2002 and 2003) and by sponsoring participants (polycentric 2006). At the 2003 WSF the TSL supported a group of colleagues from southern sister organisations (Asia, Africa, Latin America) to participate in the events in Porto Alegre. In Finland, TSL has published two newsletters about the WSF process and some books have had articles about the WSF. Since 2002, TSL has had a special network project with the European SOLIDAR net and partners meet and arrange seminars during WSF events (see <http://www.solidar.org>). <http://www.tsl.fi>

Merja Leskinen from TSL says that *"the WSF has had a important role for TSL and SOLIDAR network. Forums have given a good platform to promote dialogue between trade unions and NGOs about global issues such as fair trade and decent work."*

Nordic and European dimensions

The European Social Forum (ESF) has been organised annually since 2002. There have been Finnish participants at each, who sometimes have also contributed to the self-organised events. For example youth associations of political parties have been active in the ESFs as their sister organisations in the organising countries or their pan-European networks have organised events there.

At least the Left Youth and Green Youth have made some efforts to send delegates to the ESF.

The ESF however has not attracted large numbers of participants from Finland and there has not been, for example, collectively organised travelling by coaches to the forums. The Finnish organisations have been more active in organising events at the World Social Forums than in European Social Forums although the number of Finnish participants has been about the same at both events. Laura Tuominen from the Left Youth of Finland recalls her visit to the ESF 2006 in Athens, Greece: *"The event was at some point a bit chaotic and the space was visibly occupied by symbols of groups of the extreme left from Turkey and Eastern Europe. Even though also problematic, I found it also really comforting that the idea of Europe in the ESF did not only consist of countries that are members in the European Union. For example themes around migration and migrants' rights were strongly present."*

During recent years there have been discussions about holding a Nordic Social Forum some time in the future. This has been encouraged strongly by southern partners who see the Nordic model as an important achievement of an active civil society that has to be celebrated, shared and nurtured.

In 2005 an initiative was made by some Nordic members of the International Council to have a Nordic Social Forum as one of the polycentric events of 2006. This did not, however, gather enough support to be realised. The idea is still in the air and might become attractive enough to carry out some time. For example Vijay Pratap from Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam India has stated very clearly that the Nordic region should have a forum in 2008. He feels the Nordics should contribute much more to the WSF process, and a good way to do is to organise a successful Nordic Social Forum in the near future.

A conscientious effort to advance Nordic dialogue in Finland was made in 2004 when Asbjörn Wahl from Norway was invited as one of the key speakers in the Finnish Social Forum. He introduced the campaign by trade unions and movements to defend the welfare state in Norway.

ACWSF in Finland

Several of the above mentioned civil society actors agreed in September 2005 to establish an Africa Commission of the World Social Forum

(ACWSF) in Finland. These actors were ATTAC Finland, KDYK (Finnish Lutheran Church Diocesan unit), NIGD, SASK, Siemenpuu Foundation, Workers Educational Association of Finland, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Finland. Since then the commission has held many events and meetings on the WSF in Finland, with the participation of Finnish activists and researchers and foreign guests involved in the WSF process. There seems to be a need for more discussions on the political relevance of the WSF process for the Finnish international solidarity movement. The discussion organised by the ACWSF and KEPA in October 2006 and this working paper are contributions to this need. However, the Africa commission has suffered from a lack of commitment which has undermined its continuity.

Significance of the WSF to the Finnish activists

In the first part we presented the general debate on the WSF process. In this part we will look at the impact the global WSF process has had specifically on the Finnish activists and their work. What kind of achievements do the activists think the process has had? What is the positive potential of the WSF process to Finns and what kind of personal impact has it had on them? What are seen as the main challenges of the process? We will discuss these questions in relation to the debate introduced in the first part.

Positive potential of the WSF to the Finnish activists

The WSF is a unique process

Some Finnish activists question why the WSF should be made the biggest and most important process in which all initiatives should be integrated. However, most of them see the WSF process as unique. Thomas Wallgren of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Finland certainly thinks so: *"The WSF is the only tool I know that has been created and developed by us and which has had a direct impact in the core of world politics. The Social forum had a role in Lula's victory in presidential elections in Brazil. It has also been claimed that the social forum played an important role in the elections after the Mumbai WSF where the fascist regime fell and a better government came in its*

place. *The WSF is indeed the only thing where we have really had an impact on global politics.*"

Potential for political significance

Several sources point to the political significance of the WSF as demonstrated by the massive anti-war demonstrations in February 2003. From the beginning the WSF process has got people together to plan all kinds of activities, which have had important impacts on mobilisations locally and globally. The Finnish activists agree that the WSF has provided a framework for extending and deepening contacts across organisations and movements. For example Leo Stranius from Friends of the Earth Finland feels that the WSF was a new option and opportunity to social movements after big demonstrations in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa.

Jukka Pääkkönen of the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK) stresses the new opportunities for trade unions and movement groups to cooperate: *"For the international trade union movement the WSF process has been the space where extremely suspicious and self-satisfied Northern trade unions have had the chance to learn to cooperate with the civil society organisations. And for activists and movement groups the forum has been the place to get to know the trade unions and their culture and ways of working, which are very different from the ways the movement groups are used to work. The WSF has been an excellent space for this."*

The more personal impact of the WSF process on Finnish activists

WSF process has also had a more personal impact on the activists. Personal motivation is crucial when activists are committed to the voluntary work for years. The real, direct contact with other activists around the world is praised by many. People need also to meet, and not just to cooperate over internet. Jaana Airaksinen of Voima Magazine comments on the importance of the forums: *"For me the international encounters have been spaces for learning and reflecting. For example in the contexts of Bretton Woods institutions they have made the impacts of these agencies very concrete. It is whole lot different to meet people who have been part of the struggles against the World Bank than just read about them. In this sense the*

encounters are really important in changing the North."

The WSF-process is a personal learning process for those involved. Hanna Kuusela of ATTAC Finland recalls her experiences in the Bamako WSF: *"In my opinion one of the finest things that the WSF has brought up is that the process of democratisation does not move on like a train. I feel that in Mali in January the greatest lesson was to see how wrong I had been in many things. This new understanding has been valuable."* The activists see that the WSF provides an unusual opportunity to understand how people with different backgrounds set the political priorities today. The WSF gives also an opportunity to understand how people argue for those priorities.

The main challenges of the WSF process for Finnish activists

The main challenges faced by the WSF process were addressed in the first part of this paper. The Finnish WSF activists find the very same themes problematic, as can be seen in the comments below. The three main challenges for the Finns are the democratisation of WSF process, the need to be able to pinpoint outcome and strategy, and the frequency of the events.

The democratisation of the WSF process

Like their colleagues globally, the Finnish activists are concerned about the democratisation of the WSF. The democratisation of both the organisation of the WSF and its participation is important. Marko Ulvila of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam insists that the WSF process should still reach out more to the movements of the marginalised majorities, and vernacular languages and expressions.

Many feel that repeated discussion on the decision-making of the IC and the democratisation of the whole process takes up too much time and space. For some Finnish actors, the discussion on the democratisation of the WSF IC is a bone of contention.

A majority of the activists feel that the issue of the democratisation of the WSF process should be dealt with. *"Particularly important political dimension in the WSF has been how to learn to practice what you create. That means that when you talk about revolution and world wide change and how do you practice those norms in your own*

forms of articulation, dialogue and being with others. It may seem like waste of time and divergence from really important themes but I think it's one of the key issues in the forum and talking about them is not a waste of time", says Teivo Teivainen of NIGD. If we want to have a democratic process, the endless discussions on decision-making are necessary: *"Especially if we have this strength that I think the WSF has, we ourselves have to be able to operate in a transparent and democratic way",* says Tapio Laakso of the Green Youth and Students.

The need for outcome and strategy

As in the debate on the *open space* of the WSF, the need for concrete outcome and strategy also occupy the Finnish discussions on the WSF. According to Teivainen it is difficult to measure what has been the benefit of holding the thousands of seminars and meetings, in the forum or wherever people have planned common action. He says it is almost impossible to count and quantify and document, that this is the thing that the social forum has produced.

Some activists find this vagueness of the process a drawback. They call for a more methodological and strategic process. For example Tove Selin of the Finnish Asiatic Society feels there is too much loose talk in the WSF events: *"The WSF could be rationalised somehow, have shorter presentations, plan more strategy, hold more genuine dialogue. In the same way this International Council could guide the organisers, also in Finland, for not giving too much time for the speakers when making presentations. One should think more of strategies and how to change the world for real."*

Some of the Finnish activists point out the chaotic nature of the forum. For instance Katarina Sehm-Patomäki, NIGD, finds the main challenge of the events are severe technical, logistical and organisational deficits. It is also felt that the forums are more like festival celebrations which lack substance.

The frequency of events

Much of the critique concerns the frequency of the events. Many activists have also heard from their partner organisations that organising and participating the events requires too much of their energy. At the moment the movements need to take too much time in participating in all the WSF events. According to Teivainen, one

is hardly recovered from the previous one when it is already necessary to use staff and other resources for the next forum, and then there are the local and regional and thematic forums. The argument has been that it has become too complicated. This is why the Finns have met positively the decision to have a week of mobilisations in 2008 and a global WSF event only in 2009.

10. Finnish Social Forum

The first Finnish Social Forum (FSF) was organised in February 2002 in Helsinki. Since then it has been an annual affair that has gradually grown in size. In this part we outline the history of the FSF and discuss the experiences of the activists.

History of the FSF

The initiative to hold the first Finnish Social Forum came from a group of activists who had organised a year before the Pro Koskenkorva campaign to promote the retention of the public ownership of industrial enterprises that were slated for privatisation. This initiative brought together people from the trade unions and new social movements dealing with global solidarity and environment. The Pro Koskenkorva alliances were the basis for the organisation of the first FSF also.

The preparatory meetings for the first FSF were held in the office of the Finnish Food and Drink Workers' Union (SEL, Suomen Elintarviketyöläisten Liitto) of Uusimaa region and were attended by a good section of Finnish civil society. The WSF charter was translated into Finnish and distributed. The forum itself was held in Helsinki at Vanha ylioppilastalo and was considered a successful event. Together with the cultural programme "Manifest 2002" in the evening, over 1,000 people attended.

In the course of preparations for the Finnish Social Forum some key organisers also made a concrete initiative to take the Pro Koskenkorva alliances further. This was named Pro Demokratia, and was announced at the closing session of the forum, and subsequently a web site, e-mail list and magazines were produced. In the first two years the information about the FSF were distributed mainly via the Pro Demokratia channels. *"When the first Finnish Social Forum was*

organised under two themes and the idea of the forum felt quite alien, the process went perhaps from the start in its own direction. Already in the beginning the WSF charter was translated into Finnish, but since the first Finnish Forum was so close to the first WSF, all the people had not concretely grasped what it was all about," says Laura Tuominen of the Left Youth.

In the beginning of the process in 2002 there was a chairperson who was elected to oversee the process. After learning it was not in line with the charter of principles of the WSF, the groups that took part in the organizing meetings of the FSF in the spring of 2006 had a serious debate about the democracy and power structures within the process. It was decided then to withdraw from the principle of having a named chairperson in the process, since no one can speak in the name of the forum.

A broad variety of Finnish NGOs are involved in the process. The Finnish social forum gathers about 1,500 participants each year. From the outset the number of organisations involved has been quite high: there were around 20 Finnish organisations involved in arranging the first FSF. During the past five years the number has steadily grown. Nowadays, about a hundred different groups participate in the Finnish Social Forum where they organize nearly 70 seminars or workshops.

From the start, environmental organisations and peace organisations have been very active in the process. Some political youth organisations and leftist groups are also involved. The social work organisations of the Lutheran church have been active. Recently the bigger NGOs, some sections of the trade unions and social work organisations have come to join the FSF. Although many sections of the trade union have been involved in the FSF, the organisers hope for a still stronger and broader involvement by them.

The main resource for the forums has been the voluntary energy and time of the people and associations organising the event. The FSF meetings are open and basically anyone is free to join. Invitations and agendas for meetings are delivered on the mailing list of the social forum. Because the group does not have a firm structure, for example a board, anyone is free to influence the process. Usually about ten to twenty-five people attend the meetings. A nominal participation fee has been paid by all event organisers and exhibition producers, apart from the poorest organisations that are allowed to participate free. Foreign

ministry information grants has been received for organising the event with some Third World guest speakers and for producing an annual FSF newsletter before the forum, which has been published as a supplement Voima magazine, which has a distribution of about 50,000 copies. Finnish and Swedish language adult education centres have provided the venues for FSF events free or with major discount, which has been a major resource.

Issues in the FSF dynamics

Participation of trade unions

Although many of the original initiators of the Finnish Social Forum came from the trade union movement, the big trade unions have until now not fully come on board the FSF. Some of them have been co-organisers of the events and there have been numerous speakers from the major trade unions, but only seldom have they taken the initiative to organise bigger events or bring their members to the event in large numbers. According to Jaana Airaksinen *"some parts of the trade union movement have also participated in the process and NGOs and movement groups have been sensitized to trade unionism (with varied success!). This coming together may have "politicised" some NGOs' work and may thus have been beneficial."*

The trade unions that have been present in one way or another in the Finnish forums include the Finnish Food and Drink Union (SEL), the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors (JHL), the Metal Workers' Union (Metalli) and The Construction Trade Union. The FSF organisers think that active participation of the large and influential trade unions would be most welcome. However, this has not happened in a bigger way yet. *"The lack in Finland of a more full involvement of organisations and the WSF process (as in making the working through the WSF process as integral part of their workings) can be seen as related to the absence of really broad based participation in the Finnish Social Forum process. For instance and importantly, the mainstream trade unions in Finland have not participated in the forum in Finland. The latter seems to be tied up with (historically rooted) cleavages in the Left in Finland, in which the mainstream trade unionists today might see the Finnish Social Forum process as mainly a space created by minority groups, like*

former pro-soviet lefties,” says Mika Rönkkö of Le Monde Diplomatique Finland.

Role of politicians and political parties

Recently there has been a discussion in the FSF organising meetings about the involvement of the political parties and politicians in the FSF. According to the WSF charter of principles, political parties are not allowed to be the organisers of the WSF. However, some political youth organisations and leftist groups have been active in FSF. This has caused some internal debate in the organising meetings on who can take part in the forum. All individuals are welcome in the process, but if the person is very strongly involved in a political party, the different roles might not be clear to everyone. There have been accusations of taking advantage of the FSF in party political campaigning: *“The problem has been that the young political careerists have tried to come here also. The forum should be an arena free of political parties, but still they try to get merit for themselves. That is a problem: it reduces credibility, drives away non-party people, and therefore should be prevented,”* says Kai Laaksonen of the Finnish Metalworkers’ Union.

In the event itself the line has been that even top politicians are welcome in the forum, but they should be there to learn and only to comment rather than be main speakers and “stars”. The organisers feel that the FSF should be the citizen’s voice to the politicians and not vice versa.

Local social forums

In Finland there have been local social forums in Turku from 2002 to 2006 and in Tampere the Pirkanmaa Social Forum was organised first in 2002 and again in 2006.

The Pirkanmaa Social Forum held in Tampere in May 2006 was organised in conjunction with the Market of Possibilities⁸ (Mahdollisuuksien tori). The synergies worked out well: the attendance of the outdoor Market hit a historic record of 2,000 and the forum inside attracted few hundred people. Encouraged by this, the Tampere group has encouraged others to organise local

⁸ “Market of Possibilities” is a 20 year old tradition in Finland where development NGOs and multicultural organisations present themselves locally in outdoor fairs.

social forums together with the Market of Opportunities event.

The ‘Locals’ and the ‘Globals’

The connection between the WSF and FSF has not been strong. *“They have been like two separate, parallel processes that have seen each other with friendship and good intentions. The relation between the Finnish Social Forum and the WSF has more been based on some individuals rather than on the process dynamics. Why they have not been more interlinked is mainly due to the lack of time. It has already been demanding to take care of our campaigns and the Finnish forum,”* says Jaana Airaksinen of Voima Magazine. Therefore the news that the WSF will be organised every two years in the future has been well received. The activists hope it will now be easier to strengthen the dialogue between the two processes.

From the outset the organisers of the Finnish Social Forum and the participants in international process have been mostly different set of people. This can be seen a natural division of labour among the activist community as both are time consuming affairs. However, at times people working for the local social forum have been critical of those who travel to the international forums but do not contribute to the local ones.

There has been talk that the Finnish WSF activists should be more involved in the Finnish Social Forum. The feeling among the FSF organisers has been that the WSF activists are not so interested on the national scene, but like to travel and meet people abroad. According to Olli-Pekka Haavisto from Friends of the Earth Finland *“the ‘movement group tourism’ is so popular among the activists that the local forums like the FSF seems important only as a fine springboard to get to travel to other WSF abroad.”* However, it seems that actually all the WSF activists are involved in the national forum too. Even if they are not there in the monthly FSF meetings, they have taken part and organised events in the Finnish forum. Despite this there is a tendency that the FSF people would like to include the globals even more.

In the FSF organising meetings there has been quite a lot of debate on bringing the national and the global processes closer to each other. Although the Finnish WSF activists have done plenty of information sharing on what is happening in the global scale, the WSF has not been conspicuous in the previous Finnish Social

Forums. At the last FSF in 2006 some steps were taken to bring them closer to each other. Oded Grajew, who is considered one of the founding fathers of the WSF process, and Oduor Ong'wen of the Nairobi WSF 2007 organising committee closed the forum ending session with personal testimonies and stories. The FSF activists feel it is necessary to emphasize the global essence of the social forum process and to make the social forums more connected to each other in order to have more political impact. Laura Tuominen from the Left Youth says that one step forward in that sense might be exploring the possibilities for organizing a Nordic Social Forum.

Achievements and limitations

The achievements and the challenges faced by the Finnish Social Forum are to a great extent the same as those of the WSFs. The activists feel that the FSF has greatly contributed to the interaction between NGOs and movement groups, not all of which have been in touch or in dialogue before. *"In my opinion, the social forum process has been an important tool in bringing different organisations together to discuss and plan for action. The Finnish civil society and NGO scene is so small that it is necessary to try to build bridges between different groups. It has also been challenging, though, to encourage collaboration between organisations that have not actively collaborated before. There is still work to do in that field. An important step forward in cooperation with different activists in different fields is the collaboration with the Lens Politica political film festival planned for next year"*, says Laura Tuominen.

Also the interaction across generations has increased, as usually the groups themselves tend to be quite homogenous. The increased interaction between movement groups, NGO's and trade unions is highly appreciated, as often they do not have too many chances for equal contact *"The FSF has further strengthened my interaction with the trade union movement. This being a cornerstone of my political activity I find it very important"*, says Jaana Airaksinen. Many activists report on the positive effects the FSF being such a large event has on them personally. They feel that seeing with their own eyes that there are a lot of people who want to take action for a better world has made it easier for them to believe in it too.

The main limitation deals with the vagueness of the social forum process. All the people who have participated in the FSF have not conceived that they have taken part in a process that is about democratisation and action against neo-liberalism. The process is too distant. The individuals and organisations that only participate in the FSF event and that are not following the WSF process so intensely often do not know about the whole debate around the *open space*. Some of the FSF activist welcome the same discussion as held in the International Council as to whether there should be political themes organising the FSF events and on what they should be. They predict that a structure of the event according to thematic groupings could help the initiatives and the networks prosper longer after the event. This would also make the process more political, which some wish for. According to Jaana Airaksinen social forums being the "only" forums is both their strength and weakness at the same time. She feels that at the moment the participants and movement groups are a bit puzzled with the process, and many desire more concrete results. Similarly in the FSF process there is a desire for more political process. The debate is still ongoing as the structure for the social forum of 2007 has not yet been decided. The debate is not very broad however, as there are only a few people and organisations who are active in the process all year round to discuss this.

11. Social forum experiences from southern partners

In this chapter we try to shed some light on the significance of the WSF process to southern partners of the Finnish international solidarity movement. We look at the WSF participation in three countries where KEPA has partners: Mozambique, Tanzania and India. We inquired about the participation in the WSF process in some other KEPA countries as well. There are no local forum processes in Indonesia and Nicaragua and the persons attached to KEPA's office in Zambia reported that there was not much awareness of forum proceedings, while commenting of the forum in Zambia to be weak that it was not well organised or advertised. While letting the other case studies speak for themselves, we think the cases presented here are interesting as they point to commonalities and divergences in the debate

on the WSF process bound up with the dynamics and characteristics of the local contexts.

A sketch of the first Mozambique Social Forum

The first ever social forum in Mozambique (MozSF) was held in Maputo in October 2006. Amade Suca from KEPA Mozambique says that about 800 people from thirty organisations took place in the forum, and in the whole process about 100 organisations involving more than 300 people took part. They had four main structures to carry on with this: (1) the Movement for the MozSF, which includes everyone interested in the MozSF process; (2) the national council, with organisations that subscribe to the charter of principles and commit themselves to work for the materialization of the MozSF, (3) the coordination committee, which is made of nine members selected from the members of the Movement respecting the diversity of the Mozambique civil society; (4) the secretariat, which is made of various commission assistants and one secretary. This last one is the technical body of the MozSF.

The Mozambique Social Forum brings together people who share the vision that one of the main problems in the country is its neo-liberal development. *“The forum offered the opportunity to enhance the cohesion among civil society organisations and their visibility. It strengthened the spirit of activism, and not that of professionalism or bureaucratization that is found among some civil society organisations today. This was seen in the marches, protests and testimonies,”* says Suca.

Viriato Teotónio E. Tamele from the Economic Justice Coalition explicitly puts forward a challenge which is frequently voiced with regards to the social forum process: *“The Mozambican forum is dominated by NGOs rather than social movements. There is a need to expose the organisations involved in the Mozambican Social Forum to other social forums in other countries and of course to the process in Nairobi. As to the WSF at large, there is a need to mobilise the mass movements to come to this space and reclaim it. The Nairobi process and the event per se will determine the role of Africa in this process.”* Tamele also says that the forum was important for his organisation because it was not dominated by the so called icon voices from civil society.

Amade Suca estimates those actors and movements that have been attending the WSF and the African Social Forum, already knew what would happen and what could be the advantages of such process. Others did not see clearly what the social forum would bring as a value added for them. After the forum, however, majority felt that the next MozSF should be organised next year. Amade Suca agrees with the current ideal that the social forum should not take any decision, but should allow people and organisations to meet, exchange ideas and make decisions that bind those attending a specific event during the social forum.

The Tanzania Social Forum – holding the government accountable

As the WSF counters the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, the Tanzania Social Forum (TSF) has its local opposition landmark in the Tanzania Economic Forum (TEF). The first edition of the TSF in 2005 was attended by over 500 participants, whereas over 1,000 participants attended the 2006 forum. According to Kenny Manara from KEPA Tanzania many of the participants for the second TSF came from groups working in the area of HIV/Aids.

The forum is an important platform for civil society organisations in Tanzania. *“It is probably the only recognisable platform for the civil society organisations to join hands in making the voices of the marginalised and the downtrodden heard. This gives them even more credibility to their constituencies,”* explains Manara. The forum has also been a channel for Tanzanian civil society groups through which to hold the government accountable. In TSF 2006, HIV/Aids activists called on the government to be more serious about the fight against the pandemic. More specifically, women living with HIV/Aids revealed the way in which the resources that are channelled through Tanzania Commission for Aids (TACAIDS) are misused and therefore recommended the alternative modality of channelling the funds.

According to Manara the relevance of the WSF process is relative to the TSF process: *“The WSF addresses global issues but there are very few movements in Tanzania that are conversant with global issues leave alone working to influence them. After all the Tanzanian poor are more affected by local corruption and leakage of public funds allocated for social services than global*

processes. However, WSF still has a role to play in making global processes pro-poor and therefore creating an enabling environment for the poor in the South to overcome the scourge of poverty.”

The challenges in terms of the inclusiveness of the *open space* process also comes forward in this account from Tanzania. Manara addresses the challenges both with regards to the WSF and the TSF and tells that it can typically be the urban based and somewhat elitist NGOs which represent Tanzania at the WSF. As the shortcoming of the TSF he sees the lack of alternatives to the currently dominant neoliberal paradigm.

As to the future of the WSF process, Manara stresses the need to keep in mind those causes of poverty which are local: *“I would like to see a WSF that is open-minded and rational, i.e. by also taking politicians and decision-makers of developing countries to task for the miseries that befall their people. As for the TSF, its future could only be ensured if the NGOs go back to basics, by directing some of their efforts in building civic engagement, which currently is missing in Tanzanians associational lives.”*

The success story of India

Background and events

The World Social Forum picked up in India in June 2001 when some Indian movement leaders met in Helsinki with a key organiser from Brazil. In connection with the seminar organised by the Network Institute for Global Democratisation the idea about taking the WSF to India some time in the future was discussed. Such discussions were held also among some other Indian and Brazilian activists elsewhere, and the first meetings to debate the idea in India were held at the end of 2001. While a clear majority agreed from the outset that the WSF process is important and promising, many felt that becoming a host for the WSF event too soon would undermine a genuine and democratic process that would be necessary for optimal political and social impacts. A consensus was reached that Asian Social Forum should be organised in early January 2003 and Hyderabad was selected as a venue. The event was a success and had some 22,000 participants.

At the end of the January 2003 the International Council of the World Social Forum decided that the next, 2004 WSF would be organised in India. The official position of the Indian

Organising Committee had been that India will not request for the event, but will organise it if the community so requests. The preparatory process started with full force by the India Organising Committee consisting of more than 100 organisations (compared to seven in Brazil). Various functional committees such as for the venue, finance, mobilisation, and programme were set up. More than 15 state social forums, such as Bihar Social Forum, were organised during 2003 to discuss the WSF’s ideas, coordinate and evolve strategies at the local level.

In January 2004 the World Social Forum was held in Mumbai. Hundreds of self-organised events were held and more than 100,000 people participated. *“It was a grand success by many accounts. What was remarkable advance compared with earlier WSF in Brazil was the visible and loud presence of the marginalised majorities such as dalits, women, rural communities and indigenous people. The middle-class nature of the forum had transformed into real people’s forum. The ordinary people from rural India did not sit so much in the seminar halls but rather expressed themselves in street processions and other cultural ways”*, says Marko Ulvila of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Finland.

The Mumbai WSF can be considered a factor in the May 2004 elections which ousted the Hindu-rightist BJP from power in India. In its place came the Congress lead government supported even by the Communist parties. This was a big victory from the aspect of cultural democracy, as it ended the open communal aggression towards Muslims and other minorities by the central government, and a small achievement in economic policies. Marko Ulvila reckons *“the election magic as a merit of the WSF process at large. In Brazil Lula became president after two rounds of the WSF and the government of India changed after the Mumbai WSF.”* However, it is almost impossible to say what role the WSF played in the election outcome that surprised all political commentators and forecasters.

There were around fifty delegates from KEPA in Mumbai WSF; employees, partners and representatives of member organisations. In the summary of his report⁹ Henri Myrntinen from KEPA writes: *“On the whole, KEPA participation in Mumbai was seen as a success. The positive impressions seemed to have outweighed smaller*

⁹ Henri Myrntinen from KEPA Indonesia wrote a report based on his evaluation among the KEPA delegates after the Mumbai WSF.

negative impressions. What was seen as important was the 'feel-good factor', or the 'moral support' which the joint experience of the event gave to the participants. I believe that this is a very valuable outcome, though one which is difficult to measure and document. If partnership is what KEPA wants to build, then events like these are necessary. The question however remains whether or not this is enough to justify the resources and effort invested into the exercise." The main point of criticism among the KEPA delegates was that the discussions, especially in the large mass events, remained on a basic level, there was no real dialogue between elites and the marginalised and not many alternatives were presented. Many saw the practical arrangements often poor. On the whole, however, it was seen as useful, especially for smaller organisations, as the WSF acted as an eye-opener, a chance to see Indian reality and gave ample opportunity for networking.

There were some contributions from India in organising and participating in the Polycentric World Social Forum in Karachi March 2006. However, the uncertainty about obtaining visas and finally small number of getting them, a Border Social Forum was organised at the Amritsar / Lahore border zone Wagha. This was attended by a good number of people on the both sides and created a new innovation in the WSF process.

During 2005 a decision was made to organise the India Social Forum and the dates were set for November 2006. This was again a great success with about 50,000 participants. The dominant language of the event was Hindi and again the turnout was to a great extent from the marginalised majorities.

The dynamics of the Indian WSF process

The WSF process has brought together many elements of the political and social movements in India. One can distinguish many different streams to which the movements, organisations and groups belong:

- Communists (ie linked to the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India-Marxist)
- Socialists (broader spectrum of the non-marxist left, including Gandhians)
- NGOs (associations of new social movements dealing with women, dalits etc, and aid agencies)

These three groupings have a dynamic relation inside the Indian WSF process. There is new cooperation but also competition for ideas, visibility and clout. Vijay Pratap thinks that "*those who are actually creating this process are small dalit groups, small peasant groups and all kinds of smaller groups. It has become part of social aspiration that they would like to go on, if not with the name WSF but some other name. The idea of open space is that whatever issue, focus, option of alliance-making or priorities you are working with, you will still be part in the same space. This option is not allowed in any other paradigm but the WSF. This ideology plays a historical role.*"

There are also groups that are critical of the WSF process and do not join it though they share much of the same concerns and objectives as the WSF participants. Some of these more radical groups came together to organise a parallel event during the 2004 WSF called the Mumbai Resistance. The flagged criticism against the WSF as being donor-driven - Ford Foundation was targeted in particular - and apolitical. The Mumbai Resistance opened the discourse about the meaning of the WSF and in a way contributed to the process by being against the way it was done. Later, the activist-author Arundhati Roy, who was one of the main speakers in Mumbai WSF, has stopped attending the forums saying it has become NGOised feelgood event without a political purpose¹⁰.

Though the number of people who have attended the social forums in India are big, compared to the population it is a tiny proportion. By now most of the politically active people in parties, movements and associations do know about the WSF and have some opinion about it. Most of those see it important, but not a primary arena for political work. There are many reservations and only some groups totally own the idea and contribute to it whole heartedly.

It remains to be seen will the next Indian Social Forum happen in 2007 or 2008. After the ISF 2006 Bhuvan Pathak from Himalya Swaraj Abhiyan, India, commented that "*although the event was a success, there should be more action and less talk next time, as especially in India there is a long history of the Gandhian mass action.*" In India the plans for the world wide mobilisations week in 2008 are very much appreciated, so a large input from Indian activists can be expected.

¹⁰ An interview of Arundhati Roy at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/03/03/151200&mode=thread&tid=25>

PART III

Future engagements with the WSF process

The future prospects of the WSF process have two important elements. First, it has been decided, that in 2008 there will not be a global forum, but rather a week of mobilisation at the same time as the World Economic Forum. Second, in year 2009 there will again be a World Social Forum. In between there will be great number of local, national and regional forums. Therefore the opportunities to engage with the WSF process in old or new ways are many.

Today the WSF can be seen as the only initiative of a quantity and quality that is challenging the neo-liberal hegemony. The coherence in this movement is shaped by the utopia that 'another world is possible', as well as by the rising demand for global democratisation. Thomas Wallgren of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam describes the great potential of the *open space* of the WSF process followingly "Our task is not to change developing countries, but to change our culture. We have to fundamentally transform this growth-oriented dominant Western culture. I have been involved with the WSF as I have seen this process to be something that helps me, and us together, to achieve just this."

In this concluding part we point to future ways of engagement with the WSF process. We address the following points: the *open space* of the WSF process can be used to build alliances vigorously. If well prepared, the planned week of mobilisations for 2008 can be a politically important instance of mobilising for change under the WSF umbrella. As there will be no global WSF in 2008, the energy released can be importantly vested in local forum processes which are a fundamental part of the WSF process. A democratisation of the WSF process is crucial to its future, and must be continued to be called for and supported. Also, a better documentation of the WSF process is a further imperative to the realisation of the potential of the WSF process. We end our conclusions and recommendations with a WSF process agenda highlighting certain upcoming events and processes.

12. Using the *open space* to build alliances vigorously

The learning potential of the WSF in order to transform our Western culture is relevant to civil society actors seeing themselves as part of an international solidarity movement. But it is equally of high relevance to the debate on the way in which development cooperation is envisioned and conducted. The *open space* of the WSF process offers the opportunity for northern and southern partners to learn from each other and plan together political actions. Besides pointing to the worthiness of engagement in the WSF process, this also points to the open stance with which one must enter the *open space* in order to allow for such learning.

Key issues in the debate on the outcome of the WSF are views of the WSF as a political actor versus the WSF as *open space* in which no unified statements are made. In this debate a **reconsideration of the concept of strategy** seems in its place. Teivo Teivainen of NIGD comments on this that "an often voiced criticism is that people just go to the forum to 'talk the talk' and not to 'walk the walk' and that there should be more strategy. The first idea of the large anti-war demonstrations of February 2003 came, I think, from the European Social Forum and North-American activists and there was never a declaration of the WSF as such against the war. Therefore, when we talk about what we can achieve, it's not only about the laying out of a strategy with common declarations. The anti-war demonstrations are one example where you did have clear, concrete results but not such a type of strategy. Thereby we have to rethink what strategy actually means in this new experience of the WSF."

Within the context of this debate on the WSF and its outcome, the decision made by the WSF International Council to have global journey of mobilisation in 2008, around the dates of the Davos World Economic Forum and a WSF again in 2009 has been warmly met by many. **The mobilisations of 2008 can point to a new political significance of the WSF, breathing new energy in to the process.** As the mobilisations of 2008 will take place under the banner of the WSF these actions are certainly of a more interesting political character and have more transformative potential than the recent attempts as mass mobilisations, as the Stand Up campaign and the white band actions by global NGO's. A few issues could be agreed upon to be advocated. A global mobilisation highlighting

these issues could have a significant effect to advance global reforms, but also to strengthen and motivate coalitions working on these issues. Such mobilisation could also inspire further action, in a similar vein as the land mines campaign and the international criminal court or Multilateral Agreement on Investment campaigns have inspired new action. **Also, Finnish actors can benefit from the synergies of the mobilisation in 2008.**

The decision to have no global forum in 2008 will release the necessary energy to work on local processes. The decision could also have repercussion as to how local forums will organise their process, as local and global WSF events could alternate each other to ensure a process incorporating local and global processes and enough energy for both. Such **strengthening of local forum processes is fundamental to the whole WSF process and its outcome.**

Related to this is the issue as in how far the WSF is a process. Local forum processes constitute the backbone of the WSF process. Yet, how connected do the local forums feel to the WSF process? Are there mechanisms in place ensuring a feeding of the different forum levels into each other, which is of great importance to the outcome of the WSF process?

Positive in this respect is the development of the website <http://www.wsfprocess.net>. It could develop into a database of the alternatives accompanying the rising demand for global democratisation. While the website is a preparatory tool for the Nairobi forum, it can be used also after WSF 2007. Therefore, anyone can sign up to this database and engage with other groups in the planning of common action and the elaboration of alternatives. Matti Kohonen of Tax Justice Network has the following proposal as to how to stimulate and advance the formulation of alternatives in the WSF process: *"A more structured way of making declarations should be developed in the WSF, where people could make some sorts of 'open declarations' which are base-line documents for social change. No need to have final blue prints, but serious proposals that always ask for more comments and more activism to complement it."* he says.¹¹ These methodological tools and the discussion around them are also important for local forum processes in order to shape their methodology.

Also **establishing a Finnish WSF commission** is instrumental to join those active in the FSF and

¹¹ Quoted during a World Public Finances strategy meeting in Helsinki, 17 November 2006.

WSF processes, the new actors and WSF researchers. The commission could discuss ways of making use of the potential of the WSF process and how to make the experiences on different levels of the WSF process feed better into on each other.

As Katarina Sehm-Patomäki of NIGD notes, *"in the WSF the open space and the giving birth to new political agencies are not exclusive of each other."* A feasible strategy in engaging with WSF can include both defending the *open space* and building political alliances vigorously. In order to realise this potential of the *open space*, **the WSF has to be treated as a process, not just series of events.** Well intended and thoroughly prepared work using the methodology of the WSF can certainly lead to new and impressive results in political action.

The WSF 2008 mobilisation week can have positive results in terms of global civil society movements asserting themselves in clear unified voices on certain issues. The action week calls for political creativity and a new kind of commitment to the idea of *open space* as a unifying force. The challenge of the action week, which is seen as embodying new political significance for the WSF, will be to have well prepared mobilisations. Hand in hand with this is the possibility to concentrate on and strengthen the local WSF processes.

13. Supporting the democratisation of the WSF

Issues of democratisation face the WSF process itself in various forms: the participation in terms of numbers as well as nature, the need for more grassroots involvement, and the need to break with any dominance of (I)NGO's. *"There is a need to mobilise the mass movements to come to this space and reclaim it. The Nairobi process and the event per se will determine the role of Africa in this process,"* says Viriato Tamele of Economic Justice Coalition, Mozambique. *"Whether or not the WSF will gather a broad based participation from both South and North, will be critical as to its future,"* says Mika Rönkkö of Le Monde Diplomatique Finland.

Other issues of concern are the lack of transparency and clarity in the workings of the WSF International Council and Secretariat. Their composition, decision-making procedures and role at large are important elements that affect

the organisation and political direction of the process. Vijay Pratap of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam India is of the opinion that the International Council should be seen in new light: *“It should not be judged by my Indian ideological level, or any liberal, Gandhian, socialist or Marxist paradigm because it doesn’t allow any one vanguard party to take the lead. The IC has to be judged from a new perspective where the primary and the participative democratic society will come into being when all aspects of life are addressed to. Every issue is as important as the revolution, be it children, sexual minorities or climate. Every issue constitutes a comprehensive revolution, and every section of the society has to participate. I think this is a new paradigm and if the IC would work this way, the movement could flower.”*

Also on Finnish local forum level issues of democracy, transparency and participation must be addressed. Evaluations should be continued as to who are participating in the process and who are absent from it. Absent actors must be welcomed to join the local WSF process. For instance the participation of the bigger trade unions and immigrant communities should be encouraged. Also planning meetings and decision-making processes must be evaluated in this light and a further democratisation be continued to be discussed. The earlier proposed WSF commission could also be fruitful in addressing these issues.

The actors of the WSF process will need to address the lack of democracy and transparency in the *open space* as well as in the WSF International Council, for this will negatively affect participation and the quality of the *open space* for dialogue. A further opening and a maximum transparency of the WSF IC should be continued to be called for. Supporting the participation of grassroot groups in the *open space* is most valuable to democratise the WSF.

14. Documenting the process for and in constant change

As has already been hinted at, it would be important to have a **better documentation** of the outcomes of the forum. The WSF process already has a large but not well enough documented outcome of which the anti-war demonstrations in February 2003 are an example. But there are many other forms of outcome; as the WSF as a model for the organisation of struggle and the

learning processes for the participants through their encounters in the *open space*.

To capture the essence of the WSF as a historical innovation there is clear need for better documentation and archiving. The WSFprocess.net database, which is a tool to develop alternatives, is one potential archiving instance of the alternatives.

Mika Bööck of NIGD has suggested to involve public libraries in the WSF documentation. He has organised workshops with librarians in the Mumbai WSF and Mali WSF, and one is slated for the Nairobi WSF also. One initiative taken in Finland has been to set up a WSF library corner at the Leppävaara library of Espoo. This idea could be multiplied.

In Finland another option would be to set up a WSF archive in one of the museums devoted to people’s movements. They include the Kansan arkisto in Helsinki and Työväen keskusmuseo in Tampere. It would be beneficial for the institutional memory of the WSF movement to have all basic documents such as programme papers located on one site, hopefully both in print and electronically.

15. Next landmarks of the WSF process

The next **World Social Forum will be held in Nairobi, 20-25 January 2007.** This will be an important occasion for African civil society groups to raise their concerns and visions and share them with the rest of the world. Already now it can be seen how the decision to hold the WSF in Africa has stimulated new joint activities and formations in African countries. There will probably be considerably less participants in Nairobi than in the previous global WSF events because Kenya is so much smaller a country than Brazil or India. However, the prospects for qualitative advances in terms of methods, issues and alliance building seem very good. The fourth day of the Nairobi forum is meant to be specifically filled with activities focusing on alternatives and strategising.

The Finnish Social Forum will be held for the sixth time on 21-22 April 2007 in Arbis, Helsinki. The preparations are well under way. It will be a good opportunity to reflect on past parliamentary elections and the Nairobi experiences and to gather momentum for the 2008 mobilisation. There will also be local Social forums in Tampere

(probably in May) and in Turku (usually in the autumn).

Since the United States is an important player globally, **the US Social Forum in June 27 - July 1, 2007 in Atlanta**¹² is of international significance. The US Social Forum is seen of strategic importance by many, and as such important to be supported and participated in.

In 2008, a week of mobilisations will take place at the same time as the WEF. The WSF IC has set up a working group on the process. Some groups have already come together to suggest issues and modes of action, most notably left groups from Italy. Also a coalition of groups coordinated by Third World Forum / World Federation of Alternatives will most likely come up with some suggestions in Nairobi.

Where should the WSF 2009 be held? The Brazilians would probably like to have the big event again in Porto Alegre. A growing candidate that has been also formally present in the IC discussions is US/Mexico border. The small Border Social Forum in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico this year, and the US Social Forum in 2007 are building a basis for having the WSF in the 'belly of the beast' in 2009. Also a location in Europe or South-East Asia will probably rise up in discussions.

We end with a view on how to meet the challenging WSF agenda for change Marko Ulvila from Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam shared this with us: *"I would suggest that activists adopt a new attitude where we would see ourselves more in terms of being part of societal flow rather than being in the vanguard and leading the reluctant ordinary people to a different future. This idea is very nicely expressed in a statement I found in a US journal Green Horizon Quarterly, Fall 2006. It goes like this:*

*'Message from the Hopi Elders
To my fellow swimmers:*


*There is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift, that there are those who
will be afraid.
They will try to hold on to the shore.
They are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.
Know that the river has its destination.
We must let go off the shore, push off into the river,
keep our heads above the water.
At this time in our history, we are to take nothing
personally, least of all*

*ourselves, for the moment that we do our spiritual
growth and journey come to a halt.*

The time of the lone wolf is over.

*Gather yourselves. Banish the word struggle from
your attitude and vocabulary.*

*All that we do now must be done in a sacred man-
ner and in celebration.*

We are the ones we have been waiting for." 

¹² See also <http://www.ussf2007.org/>

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Links to the WSF sites

Global

The World Social Forum <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/>

Nairobi WSF 2007 <http://wsf2007.org/>

The WSF Process site <http://www.wsfprocess.net/>

WSF India – India Social Forum <http://www.wsfindia.org/>

Ciranda information site on WSF <http://www.ciranda.net/spip/?lang=en>

Europe/Finland

The European Social Forum <http://www.esf-fse.org/>

Finnish Social Forum <http://www.prodemokratia.net/suomensosiaalifoorumi/>

Pirkanmaan sosiaalifoorumi <http://www.maanystavat.fi/tampere/psf.php>

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List of the people interviewed for this working paper:

Jaana Airaksinen, Voima Magazine, Finland
Kai Laaksonen, The Finnish Metalworkers' Union, Finland
Merja Leskinen, Workers Educational Association of Finland
Kenny Manara, The Service Center for Development Cooperation, Tanzania
Bhuvan Pathak, Himalya Swaraj Abhiyan, India
Vijay Pratap, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, India
Mika Rönkkö, Le Monde Diplomatique Finland
Katarina Sehm Patomäki, NIGD, Finland
Leo Stranius, Friends of the Earth Finland
Amade Suca, The Service Center for Development Cooperation, Mozambique
Viriato Teotónio e. Tamele, Economic Justice Coalition, Mozambique
Teivo Teivainen, NIGD, Peru
Laura Tuominen, The Left Youth of Finland
Marko Ulvila, Demokratiafoorumi Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, NIGD, Finland
Thomas Wallgren, Demokratiafoorumi Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Finland

Inputs in the WSF Dialogi event on 16th October 2006 organised by Kepa and ACWSF

Jaana Airaksinen, Voima Magazine
Olli-Pekka Haavisto, Friends of the Earth Finland
Outi Hakkarainen, The Service Center for Development Cooperation
Hanna Kuusela, Attac Finland
Tapio Laakso, ViNO - Green Youth and Students of Finland
Timo Lappalainen, The Service Center for Development Cooperation
Laura Lodenius, Peace Union of Finland/Rauhanliitto
Anu Lounela, Siemenpuu Foundation
Vijay Pratap, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam India
Jukka Pääkkönen, SASK
Mika Rönkkö, Le Monde Diplomatique Finland
Tove Selin, Finnish Asiatic Society / Aasian ystävät
V.B. Singh, CSDS, India
Leo Stranius, Friends of the Earth Finland
Maria Svanström, Friends of the Earth Finland
Teivo Teivainen, NIGD
Laura Tuominen, The Left Youth of Finland
Thomas Wallgren, Demokratiafoorumi Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam
Kim Weber
Anna Ylä-Anttila, ATTAC Finland

About the authors

Jarna Pasanen is an activist living in Tampere, Finland. Her main engagement for the past ten years has been the Friends of the Earth Finland. In 2003-2004 Pasanen spent four months assisting Coalition for Environment and Development in organising the WSF in Mumbai, India. She also participated in the Delhi Social Forum in 2003 and India Social Forum in 2006. In Finland Pasanen has participated in all the Finnish Social Forums and has taken part in the FSF organising meetings around 2003 and 2004.

Ruby van der Wekken lives in Helsinki, Finland and has attended the five WSFs from 2001 - 2005 in Porto Alegre and Mumbai, as well as the Pan Amazon Forum in Manaus Brasil, in 2003 and the Finnish Social Forum of 2006. As a representative of NIGD she has attended several WSF IC meetings, has been following and reporting on the issues in the debate on the WSF process for NIGDs newsletter and has been involved in information work around the WSF process in Finland. As NIGDs WSF coordinator van der Wekken has been involved in preparatory activities for most WSFs.